

Message Text

SECRET

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46

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 PM-03 NSC-05

SP-02 SS-15 L-02 INRE-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 MC-02

ACDA-05 OMB-01 EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 SAJ-01 H-02 /065 W

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O 171742Z MAR 75 ZFF-4

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE IMMEDIATE 3419

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

OSAF/IL IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY OSLO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T NOFORN BRUSSELS 02346

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NL, BE

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF BRUSSELS 2303

1. BELGIAN SOURCES CONFIRM THAT F-104 REPLACEMENT ISSUE WILL BE ON AGENDA FOR THE MARCH 18 BELGIAN-DUTCH BILATERAL TALKS. WE HAVE ALSO LEARNED THAT F-104 REPLACEMENT IS BEING DISCUSSED AT AN INNER CABINET MEETING TOADY. AS THIS IS FIRST TIME THAT ISSUE HAS BEEN OFFICIALLY RAISED AT PRIME MINISTER'S LEVEL, WE DOUBT THAT BELGIAN DECISION WOULD BE MADE ON BASIS OF ONE RESTRICTED CABINET MEETING AND IN TIME FOR THE MEETING WITH THE DUTCH. ONE RELIABLE SOURCE ASSURED US THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE HAGUE MEETING IS LIMITED TO ENSURING THAT BELGIUM AND NETHERLANDS CHOOSE THE SAME AIRCRAFT. ANOTHER WELL-PLACED SOURCE TOLD US THAT BELGIUM WOULD REVIEW THE NEW FRENCH OFFER IN NEXT 15 DAYS.

2. OUR SOURCES INDICATE THAT FRENCH HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED THEIR PRICE OFFER ON MIRAGE UNTIL IT IS "COMPARABLE" TO F-16

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PRICE. FRENCH HAVE OFFERED PRICE IN NATIONAL CURRENCIES, TO

ELIMINATE PROBLEM OF CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS, AND HAVE IMPROVED INFLATION GUARANTEE ALONG LINES DESCRIBED IN PARA 3 OF REFTEL.

3. BELGIANS REMAIN SUSCEPTIBLE TO FRENCH ARGUMENT THAT DASSAULT PROVIDES EUROPE WITH ITS ONLY POSSIBLE HOPE FOR A VIABLE EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY. THE KEY QUESTION FOR THE BELGIANS IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FRENCH ARE REALLY PREPARED TO WORK WITH THE OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (INCLUDING GERMANY) TO BUILD A TRULY EUROPEAN AERONAUTICS INDUSTRY. FURTHERMORE, TINDEMANS, WHO IS SEARCHING FOR SOME WAY TO RELAUNCH THE MOVEMENT TOWARD EUROPEAN UNITY, MAY CONCLUDE THAT SELECTION OF MIRAGE COULD LAY BASIS FOR FORWARD MOVEMENT TOWARD EUROPEAN INTEGRATION.

4. EMBASSY HAS BEEN USING ARGUMENT THAT A VIABLE EUROPEAN AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY IS MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP IF IT HAS THE BENEFIT OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY IN F-16. EMBASSY ARGUMENT HAS APPEARED TO IMPRESS SEVERAL KEY BELGIANS. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT CREDIBILITY U.S. OFFER TO MAKE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE TO CONSORTIUM IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN INFLUENCING BELGIAN CHOICE OF LIGHTWEIGHT FIGHTER PLAN.

5. ON THE BASIS OF TODAY'S SOUNDINGS, WE BELIEVE THAT INFO IN PARAS 2 AND 3. OF REFTEL IS MORE AN INDICATION OF WHAT BELGIAN MOD VANDEN BOEYNANTS WOULD HIMSELF LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH DUTCH THAN A COORDINATED BELGIAN GOVERNMENT POSITION. FIRESTONE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MILITARY PROCUREMENT, F-104
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 MAR 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE02346
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750092-0999
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750345/aaaabomp.tel
Line Count: 87
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRUSSELS 2303
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 APR 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <16 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: F-104 REPLACEMENT
TAGS: MASS, NL, BE
To: STATE OSAF/IL
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006